

## Written Testimony for Senate Bill 6517: An Act Implementing The Recommendations Of The Task Force to Analyze The Implementation Of Laws Governing Dyslexia Instruction And Training

My name is Brynn Lipstreu and I am an advocate, teacher and also parent to a child with dyslexia. I reside in Scotland, CT and I am in full support of Senate Bill No. 6517.

My daughter, now ten and in the fifth grade, was diagnosed with dyslexia by a neuropsychologist when she was six and in first grade. As an educator myself, I knew that she was not reading at an appropriate grade level. Her kindergarten teacher the previous year had told me that my daughter needed to “try harder” and “stay focused”. She spent her kindergarten free-choice center time sitting in the corner of the room finishing many unfinished work pages while her teacher watched on not knowing the problem was she couldn’t read. When she got to January of first grade, I knew for sure there was something holding her back from learning to read and spell as her typical peers were. She was falling further behind each day. I was assured by her first-grade classroom teacher that “she was fine” despite her remedial reading levels. She was part of the school’s SRBI program and receiving interventions from the occupational therapist only for crossing midline, large letter formation and letter reversals (all red flags of dyslexia). She was not, however, getting any services for her reading or spelling challenges. It was at the January SRBI meeting that I expressed, once again, my concerns of my daughter’s reading skills and that “she’s fine” was not working and I had in fact made an appointment for testing with a neuropsychologist. The Whole Language approach to learning was not working for her.

In February of 2016, my daughter had an official diagnosis of dyslexia and twenty-one-page report, which was shared with her school and I officially requested a PPT with the school. My first PPT was held on March 21, 2016. My daughter was denied services. They wanted to perform a diagnostic placement due to what I believe to be a failure to implement tiered SRBI interventions before the initial PPT and a lack of knowledge of her diagnosed dyslexia. I requested six other PPTs before my daughter was granted the Individual Education Plan she needed to find success in her reading and spelling growth.

I believe that due to the lack of knowledge that the educators and administrators had about dyslexia they were worried about my daughter’s diagnosis and how to best differentiate her learning. It was evident at the very first PPT I attended that her classroom teacher had very little knowledge of what dyslexia was as she stated, “I find it interesting that she has dyslexia, because every time she writes the word cat, she writes t-a-c.” Thankfully, at that very moment, the reading specialist informed her that was not what dyslexia was. The school psychologist, when speaking of accommodations for my daughter suggested she just use spell check for spelling because her spelling “did not really matter”. She had no knowledge that there is a correlation between encoding (spelling) and decoding (reading words).

These are just two of the many examples I can give of educators and staff facilitating PPT meetings lacking knowledge of dyslexia.

My daughter has been receiving individual specialized multi-sensory structured literacy instruction since May of 2016 when she finally qualified for an Individualized Education Plan and has finally made growth with her reading and spelling skills. Whereas she is not reading or spelling at an appropriate grade level yet, she is making gains in her own personal skills. This is due to a fantastic special education teacher that has a great knowledge base of dyslexia. She knows how to teach in the multi-sensory structured literacy way that my daughter needs to grow in her skills. Without this teacher in my daughter's life, I do not believe she would be making advancements in her reading and spelling skills.

I am a teacher myself. I teach grade three, which is the grade where students start to make the shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn". The content of learning becomes deeper than previous grade levels. When I went to college in the late 1990's to become a teacher myself, I remember being told that dyslexia wasn't really a thing and that being dyslexic was different than having dyslexia. I am a mid-career teacher with many years left before retirement. There are many teachers currently practicing that were taught the same beliefs of dyslexia that I was. Teacher training of in-service teachers is imperative to change this belief system and move forward in our efforts to help all children reach their full potential in reading. Being proactive in training pre-service teachers while in teacher preparatory programs can provide districts with well-versed educators in the topic of dyslexia and structured literacy. These new educators while working with veteran teachers that have had professional development opportunities in dyslexia and structured literacy can save money for districts by identifying those at risk for dyslexia early on and providing early interventions before more costly interventions are necessary. The older a child gets, the harder it is for them to overcome the challenges of dyslexia. An advisory council to evaluate the quality of structured literacy training provided in pre-service programs can help move forward the implementation of structured literacy for all students.

Had my daughter been identified in kindergarten or even preschool and given appropriate interventions, she may not be behind her peers as she is today. Had there been a prescreen questionnaire when she entered public schools, the "red flags" may have triggered the district to implement a different method for her to learn to read. Had her teachers been knowledgeable of the signs or "red flags" of dyslexia, she would have started interventions earlier. This could have all been possible if her teachers and the administrators in the district had current knowledge of what dyslexia is, how to identify a child at risk for having dyslexia, how it can affect a child's learning and how to provide interventions to best help those with dyslexia.

Again, I wish to express my full support of Senate Bill No. 6517. I do believe that teachers want to help their students grow and learn, but sometimes lack the

necessary tools or knowledge to do so. With such a high percentage of learners with dyslexia (perhaps 15%-20% according to the International Dyslexia Association <https://dyslexiaida.org/dyslexia-basics/>) training of teachers, both pre-service and in-service, will do nothing but benefit students learning to read. Thank you for the past Dyslexia legislation, this proposed legislation and your continued efforts to see that implementation is happening with fidelity.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brynn Lipstreu